

Record of the comments collated as part of a PESTLE analysis carried out during a series of strategic planning workshops facilitated by Icon between January and July 2021

What are the key external opportunities and threats in the coming decade?	Thematic area	Threat or opportunity?	PESTLE	What might be the impact on the conservation profession?
Risks to collections (and people / society) arising from climate change	Climate	Threat	Environmental	Need to adapt practice to be more energy efficient and carbon conscious e.g. passive environmental control. Need to find alternatives to harmful materials used in the studios, though new "green" materials may a higher financial cost. Increased problems with pest management. Challenging conversations will be needed about what we can realistically expect to save for future generations.
Current interest in re-use and recycling, which is driven by climate change concerns.	Climate	Opportunity	Social	Potential to gain support for conservation and build a greater appreciation of the skills need to care for objects.
Conservation should strive to be better integrated with other care of collections professions.	Collaboration	Opportunity	Social	Conservation gains greater recognition and support. Collaboration and shared working/learning is increased. Conservators are included in important observations about the future of collections/museums etc.
Potential to increase connections and collaborations with other organisations in the cultural heritage ecosystem.	Collaboration	Opportunity	Social	Making better connections and partnerships could lead to greater efficiency and impact. Joining with others creates a stronger voice and supports advocacy outcomes. Sharing knowledge and resources means being able to do more with less.
High levels of uncertainty in all areas of life post-Covid.	COVID-19	Threat	Social	Forward-planning is very challenging. Lack of job security makes people willing and able to volunteer for committee / Board roles. Emerging professionals are unwilling to commit to the Pathway Membership or to begin accreditation applications.
Increased digital access and public interest in engaging online.	Digital	Opportunity	Technological	Increased engagement with heritage through virtual channels might lead to a greater enthusiasm to engage with the real objects in their settings. Digital platforms provide an opportunity for conservators to showcase their work e.g. through video and timelapse photography. Potential to increase the reach of conservation stories and Icon activities.
Success of online webinars and other virtual training and CPD events.	Digital	Opportunity	Technological	Ability to share learning, research and good practice with a wider (and global) audience. Increases participation and engagement. Creates an international community and allows members to expand their professional networks.
Uncertainty regarding post-Covid funding priorities for cultural heritage and conservation, but conservation is unlikely to be a priority within national and regional museums, galleries and institutions.	Funding	Threat	Economic	Exhibition plans may be changed and scaled down. There will be less money available for conservation projects and staff leading to the potential for the sector to shrink. Potential negative impact on freelancers as many rely on funding trickling down through the ecosystem from the major institutions. Small practices without a pipeline of work may no longer be commercially viable and may fail.

Grant making bodies are changing their priorities and there may be less interest in funding conservation.	Funding	Threat	Economic	Exhibition plans may be changed and scaled down. There will be less money available for conservation projects and staff leading to the potential for the sector to shrink. Potential negative impact on freelancers as many rely on funding trickling down through the ecosystem from the major institutions. Small practices without a pipeline of work may no longer be commercially viable and may fail.
Decrease in local authority support for museum services.	Funding	Threat	Economic	Local authorities see culture as being about festivals - not about museums and heritage. Conservation is not a priority in local authorities and not well funded. Conservation and museums service are but back or scrapped.
Tendering processes remain very challenging for small businesses.	Funding	Threat	Economic	Small businesses waste time on unsuccessful tenders. Running a conservation business becomes less financially viable.
Ongoing political battles ("Culture Wars") about what we choose to preserve and how this should be done e.g. recent high profile campaigns relating to de-colonisation, statues, National Trust report on slave trade connections.	Policy	Threat	Political	Erosion of independence of museums and institutions - more Government pressure to conform with policy. Less political / public support for museums depending on viewpoint. "Culture Wars" are divisive and have a negative impact on engagement.
Changes to culture and heritage legislation and policy (both secular and ecclesiastical).	Policy	Threat	Legal	Lessening in protection for heritage structures. Less emphasis on best practice in conservation.
Ongoing change and development in international conservation charters.	Policy	Opportunity	Legal	Potential to make a positive impact if we are able to contribute, but could be harmful if the changes don't include a UK perspective. Political withdrawal from Europe makes UK conservators less visible.
Changing view of the value of cultural heritage - new materials / objects / collections.	Policy	Opportunity	Social	Wide-reaching impact as this will require new technical understanding, and education at different levels. Need to involve a broader range of people in discussions about what heritage is or should be.
Changing view of heritage - contested heritage / culture wars / decolonisation	Policy	Opportunity	Social	Wide-reaching impact as will require new ethical understanding and education at different levels. Needs to involve a broad range of people in discussions about new approaches.
Further devolution / break-up of the UK.	Policy	Threat	Political	New relationship with Icon Scotland Group and organisations in Scotland would need to be developed.
Organisational and cultural change in museums, galleries and institutions.	Policy	Threat	Social	Greater emphasis on commercial activity, interpretation and education could lead to less resources being devoted to conservation and heritage science.
Not enough people - the public, stakeholders, decision-makers, clients - understand what conservation is and why it matters.	Recognition	Threat	Social	Conservators' work is not valued because the contribution it makes to individuals and society is not recognised. This feeds the spiral of lack of funding and investment.
Current public interest in conservation arising from TV shows such as The Repair Shop and Secrets of the Museum (V&A).	Recognition	Opportunity	Social	Capitalizing on the positive opportunity for advocacy and outreach could increase the visibility of and respect for conservation. But this needs to counter the problem that TV programmes paint a false picture of what conservation is and the time/money required to treat objects. The focus is also often on restoration rather than conservation.

Conservators are not valued by the museums, galleries and institutions in which they work.	Recognition	Threat	Social	If there are no conservators in senior leadership roles (director level) then there is limited ability to influence and to create positive change. This feeds the spiral of lack of funding and investment.
Conservation and conservators are not valued by the public / clients.	Recognition	Threat	Social	Very little grassroots advocacy for conservation. Fewer clients commissioning work from conservators.
Lack of training placements and internships that support early career professionals to gain the skills needed for the workplace.	Training	Threat	Economic	Emerging professionals are unable to gain the necessary skills and experience. Museums and studios are not able to find staff with the skills that they need.
Teaching in schools is moving increasingly away from arts subjects; there is little support for history and practical subjects.	Training	Threat	Social	Fewer young people are aware of potential careers in conservation. Fewer young people leave school with practical skills. Fewer young people gain an appreciation of culture and heritage. Universities and vocational courses have to adapt in order to attract students and teach basic skills.
Conservation is not visible in schools.	Training	Threat	Social	Young people are not aware of conservation as a possible career and therefore there is limited opportunity for the profession to attract a more diverse range of practitioners.
Support for vocational training from Government.	Training	Opportunity	Political	Capitalizing on interest in apprenticeships and other work-based learning programmes to provide different ways into the profession could help to tackle barriers to entry and increase diversity.
Fragmenting of conservation into many specialists disciplines.	Workforce	Threat	Social	Less cross-disciplinary working. Icon becoming less inclusive of all conservation professionals.
Heritage science infrastructure is under threat.	Workforce	Threat	Social	Less availability of trained heritage scientists to support conservation and research.
Socio-economic issues mean that attracting a diverse workforce is a major challenge.	Workforce	Threat	Economic	The high cost of training and low wages post-training are a barrier to entry to the conservation profession. The difficulty of tackling these issues makes it difficult for the sector to become more diverse.
Conservators and the conservation profession are generally resilient.	Workforce	Opportunity	Social	Conservators have the skills and attributes to be able to adapt to changing circumstances. This means that they may be able to spot new opportunities and move into new areas of practice.
Numbers of students coming out of training/universities is not matched against demand/ jobs available.	Workforce	Threat	Social	The oversupply of applicants for a limited number of roles means that talented and passionate conservators leave the profession because they cannot find work, or they migrate to other countries.
Sector wide loss of skills in craft, culture and heritage professions has secured media interest. The HCA Red List of Endangered Crafts and the APPG for Craft have brought the loss of skills to the attention of politicians.	Workforce	Opportunity	Social	Capitalizing on the positive opportunity for advocacy and outreach could increase the visibility of and respect for conservation. Looking outwards and working with allied crafts and disciplines could raise the profile of conservation could attract new supporters. Being more inclusive in terms of our definition of who is a conservator means that we could welcome more people working with built heritage into Icon.
Unemployment (particularly high levels of youth unemployment).	Workforce	Opportunity	Economic	Social problems but also an opportunity to create more places for vocational trainees and to grow a more representative workforce.

Interventive treatment skills / practical bench skills are less valued than preventative skills.	Workforce	Threat	Social	Fewer conservators are able to treat objects to acceptable standards.
Impact of Brexit.	Workforce	Threat	Political	Potential for labour and material shortages; rising costs. Narrower pool of people in terms of training and employing conservators. (Many conservators currently working in the UK are from other European countries.)